

Directory will preserve the names of Civil War soldiers

■ **History:** Genealogical Society of Utah to help enter 3.5 million names on computer.

SHARPSBURG, Md. (AP) — Visitors to Civil War battlefields soon will be able to ask a computer if their ancestors were Yankees or Rebels.

The National Park Service has begun to make a computerized directory of all 3.5 million Civil War soldiers. Historians estimate that at least half of all Americans have relatives who fought.

The Genealogical Society of Utah, affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Federation of Genealogical Societies intend to enter the names on computer. Otherwise, it would cost the government \$4.5 million to hire a company to computerize all the names.

Federal officials say the computerized directory should aid those trying to trace

their ancestry.

"It's going to change the way we look at the war. It's going to personalize the battles, the struggles that went on," said Rich Rambur, superintendent at Antietam National Battlefield, one of two places where the computerized directory will be tested come fall.

"We've spent decades in the preservation of Civil War land and artifacts. Now, we're preserving the names."

The computers are expected to provide names, home states, regiments, soldiers' ranks and whether they fought for the North or South, said John F. Peterson of the park service's computer division in Washington.

"It won't prove that your great-grandfather fought at Gettysburg, for example, but it will tell you what regiment he was in, and it will tell you that that regiment fought at Gettysburg," Peterson said.

Knowing the person's regiment, middle

initial or home state would help narrow the search for common names such as Smith and Lee, Peterson said.

The computers will provide brief information on the 7,000 Civil War regiments and units, and information on many of the 10,500 battles, skirmishes and engagements, he said.

"We're also going to be able to track where Civil War soldiers are buried at our 11 Civil War cemeteries within the park system," Peterson said.

Computers are to be installed at all 28 Civil War sites that the National Park Service operates in 21 states and the District of Columbia.

About 11 million people visit the sites each year. Peterson said the most frequently asked question is: "Did my great-grandfather fight here?"

To answer the question, park historians now must research pension and service re-

cords, state rosters, census and war records and county histories.

Visitors will be given information on other sources of information, and they'll be encouraged to continue their research at the National Archives in Washington.

Increased interest, a recent public television series on the war and Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan's call in July 1990 for a public-private partnership to save America's battlefields helped pushed the project forward.

"The park service has been using computers for administrative matters for years. What excites me is that here will be a way to take some of this technology and put it in the hands of visitors — to let everybody be their own historian," said Woody Harrell, superintendent of Shiloh National Military Park on the Tennessee-Mississippi border, the other Civil War site where the computer system will be tested.